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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: improving public-sector effectiveness

Statement submitted by Franciscans International and International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, Elizabeth Seton Federation, International Association of Charities, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Introduction

"Vision without action is merely a dream, action without vision is merely passing time, but action with vision can change the world." Nelson Mandela

Improving public sector effectiveness requires a vision – a vision of providing quality services for all the public but particularly for the most vulnerable social groups. Using resources to provide public services only for those who can, because of their own wealth and power provide for themselves, turns upside down the notion of public sector. To paraphrase Nelson Mandela's statement: A definite goal without adequate resources is merely a dream; adequate resources without a definite goal squander resources; a definite goal with adequate resources can change people's lives.

International goals and commitments have been well established. The Millennium Development Goals, the Monterrey Consensus, UN Summits and international agreements provide more than enough policy guidelines. GA Resolution A/RES/S-24/2 of 15 December, 2000, *Further Initiatives for Social Development,* already provides an extensive and clear programme for effective social policy. Implementation requires the fulfillment of the financial agreements made at Monterrey. Global finances are more than adequate to fulfill the commitments made. But unequal distribution of global wealth, unjust global structures, particularly in trade and finances, and burdensome debts, prevent many countries from moving toward fulfillment of their goals.

These constraints coupled with lack of political power in a globalized world thwart even those government officials (and we hope there are many) who enter into public service hoping to make a positive difference in people's lives. Often original good will gets diluted or even forgotten in discouragement, cynicism, ambition or greed. A conscious, continuous revitalization of motivation to serve the public good first and foremost, is a primary and indispensable requisite for improving public sector effectiveness. Then, with clear goals and adequate resources, a government further needs to possess freedom to implement plans and direct resources as needed.

Considerations for all Governments

In many countries the majority of citizens are unable to obtain for themselves basic human necessities, such as adequate food and clean water, health services and education. The role of government is, at the very least, to enable society to function efficiently and harmoniously for all, and to ensure that the most basic needs of human life are satisfied. A strong and unswerving commitment to this governmental role is essential.

In order to address adequately the needs of people, it is indispensable that decision makers and service providers be in constant dialogue with the recipients of services. Making assumptions about other's needs often leads to inaccurate assessments, waste of resources, and unsustainable consumption patterns. In addition to ongoing consultation with the recipients of services, effective national planning for poverty reduction is improved by interdisciplinary, inter-agency and international consultation and co-operation.

Effective plans of action are based on the concrete awareness that the unmet needs of one segment of humanity or one region of the earth eventually bring suffering to all peoples. There are numerous examples to illustrate this: the global spread of diseases, poverty- induced violence and terrorism, shared effects of air or water pollution, resource depletion.

A recent study on best practices in poverty eradication points the way to effective public sector interaction with civil society to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people are met.[1] Some of the important points presented include the need for education to empower effective participation particularly in the rural areas, the understanding

[1] Best Practices in Poverty Eradication: Case Studies from the Field. Sub-committee for the Eradication of Poverty of the NGO Committee for Social Development with a Forward by Nitin Desai, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. (2003)

that effective policies must be for the long-term, and that cooperation and collaboration will enhance both the creativity and effectiveness of solutions to service provision.

Finally, to be free to act in ways that benefit citizens, government must be independent from the control of moneyed interests. To ensure such freedom requires legislation and oversight which inhibits corruption and which protects government officials from indebtedness to special interests

Considerations for developing countries

The freedom of developing countries to implement needed reforms and procedures, thus providing for the needs of their citizens, is particularly curtailed today by the control exerted from powerful institutions – be they governments or corporations – who shape the current trade and financial agreements.

It is vital that developing countries regulate carefully and strictly all privatization. In particular, effectiveness requires that they protect the delivery of the most basic human services (such as, food and safe water provision, health services, and education) from privatization.

The multilateral demand for equal participation of developing countries in global decision-making, particularly in the areas of trade and finances, as was evident at Cancun, must continue in order that they be able to negotiate policies which enable them to fulfill their mandate to their own citizens.

National governments should co-ordinate political, economic, and social policies and programs by bringing together representatives of major administrative agencies frequently along with other stakeholders.

Citizens' expectations of accountabil .y and transparency must be encouraged, respected and facilitated through effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Another important element to improve public sector effectiveness in the developing countries is promotion of South-South sharing of expertise, technology, and successful methodologies.

Considerations for developed countries

Because of their greater power and resources, developed countries have greater responsibility for public sector effectiveness in the sense described above. In the first place, their own public sectors should be effective in the provision of basic services – services which are human rights of all people. In some cases the provision of services to special populations such as those living in the rural sector, immigrants, refugees and those without adequate personal resources is insufficient. This ignores the reality that the people in these populations are indeed a rich resource for any country. One step toward fulfillment of this responsibility is careful monitoring and regulation of markets and corporations so that the welfare of workers and conservation of natural resources are given first priority.

Besides the responsibility developed countries have within their own public sectors, they also have a responsibility to promote effective public sector development in those countries of the world which lack adequate resources.

Many developing countries are financially unable to provide needed services for their citizens because of excessively heavy debt servicing. Promotion of debt cancellation, debt swap, and debt relief in poor countries is indispensable for providing needed resources for the public sector.

The establishment of an independent arbitration process under the direction of the UN would provide greater justice in the settlement of issues related to sovereign nations' debts.

Free markets contribute to development only in those countries which have free access to markets for their goods. Movement toward truly free, open markets in which developing countries are able to access the markets of the developed countries is needed.

Access to markets is meaningless, even domestically, if foreign subsidies on produce drives selling prices below local production costs. Therefore, domestic agricultural subsidies must be eliminated to allow poorer countries to compete.

Some commitments regarding ODA, particularly those made at Monterrey, are still awaiting fulfillment. Poor countries and wealthy countries alike would benefit from the healthy global economy which could be created if all nations were enabled to contribute their own natural and human riches.

Finally, given that historically the current international financial institutions, whose policies are dominated by the most wealthy nations, have succeeded in widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots, developed countries have a role in calling for and supporting reform of these institutions.

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Item 3 (b) (i) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups: tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family

Statement submitted by International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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In countries around the world, extreme poverty continues to separate parents and children, contributing to a downward spiral making it ever more difficult for these families to leave poverty behind. One example of this was described by Anna, a mother in Southeast Asia, who is a member of ATD Fourth World:

> *"My family has been on the street for three years now. The last place we had was not really a house and it flooded when it rained. The owners wanted it back and we were thrown into the streets again. I have three children who live with me. Two of my children died when they were little, one of pneumonia and one of malaria. I have given away two other daughters – Rita who is nine, is working as a domestic servant, and my youngest I gave away to be adopted. I was afraid of what might happen if they grew up in the streets. Young girls are dragged away, all because they are poor. Police harass us for sleeping on the street. But what can we do? They come in the early hours, pile us into a truck, and send us to prison camps. They are worse than regular prisons. Our relatives can visit us less often than if we are in regular jail. And in those camps, they split up the families. A father and mother are not put together with their children. How can they do that? They split us up – it's like breaking a bird's nest. Don't they see that? All we have is our family. I can't read or write a word. But I understand that what they do to us is an injustice."*

The Proclamation of the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family cites these objectives: "to increase awareness of family issues among Governments as well as in the private sector [... and] to stimulate efforts to respond to problems affecting, and affected by, the situation of families." In this spirit, as well as to support the priority theme of this year's Commission for Social Development on improving public sector effectiveness, the International Movement ATD Fourth World has been carrying out extensive research on the question of "How Extreme Poverty Separates Parents and Children." This research, which is being supported by the Focal Point on the Family within the United Nations Secretariat, is being carried out in partnership with families who live in situations of extreme poverty in Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Haiti, the Philippines, the United Kingdom and the United States.

It is well documented that individuals living in poverty have less access to both public and private resources. Yet, the family unit as a resource is rarely examined in terms of its connection to poverty. As stated in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." Nonetheless, factors associated with extreme poverty often play a role in separating parents and children from one another. The Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that it is in the overriding interest of children that they be brought up in their own family. The Convention envisages separation only when every effort has been made to support the parents with their responsibilities. Although many of the following issues have been examined in depth independently, it is critical to recognize that the many ways that poverty separates parents and children are interrelated.

A. Emergency shelter systems

Communities in both industrialized and developing countries maintain systems of alternative housing for people who lack stable housing. Often, housing is separated by age or gender and is not available for everyone. For example, some housing accepts only men or only women with children of a certain age. In these cases, families who have no choice but to accept emergency housing are unable to continue living as a family unit.

B. International adoption

Parents living in extreme poverty are sometimes pressured or coerced to turn children over to orphanages or intermediaries for international adoption. Some parents are deceived by promises of temporary care, education, and better living conditions for their children. There have been cases where children were taken by

force or bought from parents for meager sums and then adopted under the false pretense of lacking a family.

C. Child welfare and foster care

Child welfare systems in industrialized countries are disproportionately filled with children from poor families. Conditions such as lack of decent housing or supervision are often termed evidence of neglect instead of factors of poverty. Despite evidence that removing children from their families can do more harm than good, concern about the welfare of children rarely includes concern about the welfare of families. Efforts to promote child welfare must address sources of economic stress that families face.

D. Migration in search of work

Poverty is a critical factor in shaping the migration of family members. Although migration can be a source of cultural, economic and social well-being, there are instances when it can splinter a family and send its members further into poverty. Many parents are forced to migrate internally or externally when work in their community is unavailable or does not pay a living wage. Because of a lack of resources (and sometimes lack of proper documentation), many parents must leave children in the care of others while they work elsewhere in order to sustain their families. Conversely, children sometimes leave their parents and community for economic opportunities in other regions.

E. Displacement in times of crisis and child trafficking

Political and economic instability are often inseparable in their effects on migrants. Poor families are the most vulnerable to displacements because of war, persecution, or natural disaster. Families are often separated as they cross borders or migrate internally. In many of these cases, parents and children become causalities of war or dangerous migration.

Trafficking, which often involves children, is considered a modern form of slavery. Families trapped in poverty are the most vulnerable to this form of exploitation.

F. A quest for education

Parents who do not have the financial resources for education or who live in communities where education is not available are often pressured to send their children to a different region for educational opportunities. In many communities, it is a common practice for families living in extreme poverty to entrust children to more affluent relatives or acquaintances for care and education. Sometimes children are provided with this education, but in many cases they end up being exploited and not sent to school at all.

G. Ill health

Health concerns often force parents and children to separate, either temporarily or permanently. In areas where there is no adequate clinic or hospital, parents must take children to distant centers, often leaving other children at home. This can go on for extended periods of time, forcing parents to choose between their children. Additionally, the AIDS epidemic has created millions of orphans all over the world. Many of these children live with other relatives or in child-headed households.

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The Securities Children Need and Public Sector Effectiveness

All these situations make very poor families even more fragile, and make it harder for them to overcome poverty. This in turn makes it harder for their countries' governments to eradicate extreme poverty. Supporting efforts of very poor people to hold their families together will reinforce the effectiveness of the public sector in fighting poverty.

It is important for children that their parents have support from other adults. Parents living in extreme poverty often make enormous efforts to keep their families together. While these efforts often go unseen, some parents benefit from support from extended family, community members, committed volunteers, and institutions such as schools. Partnership and personal commitment are critical to identifying and supporting the strengths of parents in preserving their families. Identifying and supporting involved adults will enhance efforts by the public sector to make a difference in children's lives.

During this session of the Commission, ATD Fourth World will be sharing its study on How Poverty Separates Parents and Children. This study, written in direct collaboration with families living in extreme poverty, highlights the efforts they make, and policy and programming efforts made by communities, NGOs and governments. It also proposes new efforts to be put in place, on international and local levels, Because family members can be enormous resources for one another, national policies that help prevent separation of parents and children will reinforce the effectiveness of public sector efforts to fight poverty.